Eden redux

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In the midst of the UN Climate Change Conference[1] in its final week, it's clear that Mother Earth is sick, infected by her children whose entitled behavior spikes her fever; whips up whirlwinds that slash her coasts and flood her plains.

They ignite wildfires and pollute her air and water through huffing smokestacks and puffing exhaust pipes. Her physician, Science, has examined her symptoms, diagnosed the causes, and prescribed appropriate treatment.We, however, continue to deny not only her health but her very parentage.
Maybe we don't hear her pleas because we've been spoiled by her generosity or been corrupted by our pride and greed.Perhaps we've been distracted by the sound and fury raging in the headlines of the day —the partisan politics, social media chatter, economic competition, and internecine wars. Or maybe our sophisticated technology has made us increasingly literal-minded, unable to interpret the voice of the spirit in nature's machine.
But no matter our various excuses, rationalizations, denials, and politics; the relationship between our lives to the Earth has been the subject of the oldest stories ever told.So, perhaps in art's more universal language we may still hear and understand the truth. For instance, just as Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis lost Paradise by abusing their privilege; we seem to have lost sight of our garden's well-being in our voracious desire to consume its fruits.

Presently, the world's largest living tree in the world stands in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, its annual growth rings possessing 2,200 years of natural history. It's a veritable Tree of Knowledge that is now threatened by annual wildfires, like the poetically apt Paradise Fire that was fueled, in part, by human-caused climate change.
Or consider the poem, 'The Second Coming,' by William Butler Yeats who similarly expressed humanity's failure to commune with its collective soul, 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon can no longer hear the falconer/Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.'Yeats' language alludes to the irony of humanity's recurring disconnect from both nature and human nature.In other words, we have met the enemy, and it is us.We have been alienated from both nature and human nature.

Yeats concludes from these signs that 'Surely, some revelation is at hand.'And, in a case of modern science dovetailing with art, The United Nations recently determined that the world's failure to live up to their commitments to fight climate change will result in 'more intense flooding, wildfires, drought, heat waves and species extinction.'
Sadly, however, as Yeats suggests, too often 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are filled with passionate intensity.'Undeterred by this looming disaster, most of us, who 'lack conviction,' certainly know better as we sit idling in our air-conditioned autos under clouds of exhaust, indulging in our gas-guzzling addiction.

Meanwhile self-serving politicians frighten voters with the threat of higher gas prices that could actually curb our gluttonous consumption.Large, powerful nations that pollute the most selfishly deny responsibility for the outsized damage and cost inflicted upon nations that pollute the least.And rapacious oil companies spread disinformation to deny climate change to reap enormous profits.

In fact, according to Matthew Daly of the Associated Press, Exxon Corporation's senior lobbyist even bragged in a video that Exxon had undermined climate science[2] through 'shadow groups' to weaken President Biden's climate agenda.

Typically, we fail to look in the right direction for the source and solutions of our problem. Rather than looking within ourselves and our world, we deny our responsibility and cast our gaze outward. But as Shakespeare put it in his play, Julius Caesar, 'The faultis not in our stars/ but in ourselves'

For instance, a few billionaires have launched passenger vehicles into space in brilliant feats of technology, engineering, and physics, believing human salvation lies in the heavens.

One of them, Richard Branson, claims that 'answers to preserving our planet lie in space.'Jeff Bezos believes we can move 'all polluting industryinto space.' And Elon Musk feels the Earth's deterioration demands the establishment of space colonies.

But in turning our vision to outer space for solutions, I fear we again turn a blind eye to our umbilical connection to Earth, the only planet that naturally sustains human life.

Yet, ironically, I also hear in the billionaires' poetic observations of Earth from space an unconscious wisdom that may transcend their more industrial vision. Bezos, for example, describes Earth as 'a beautiful gem of a planet.'Branson says, 'From space the borders that are fought over on earth are arbitrary lines.From space, it is clear that there is much more that unites than divides us.' And space tourist Haley Arceneaux may have been channeling the promptings of our collective soul when she described her vision of Earth: 'Unity!'

Perhaps that word suggests the very solution we have long ignored in humanity's existential struggle with itself and its world.Eden is still here to reclaim — if we can only see beyond our blinding differences and our selfish desires.

Thomas Cangelosi is a retired teacher from Avon.

[1]: https://unfccc.int/cop27 [2]: https://chroniclet.com/news/280003/exxon-ceo-denies-spreading-disinformation-on-climate-change/

Link to the original story.

Notes

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